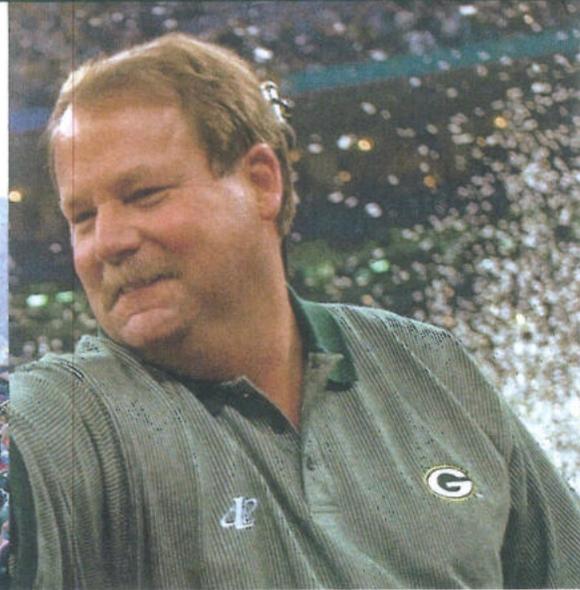
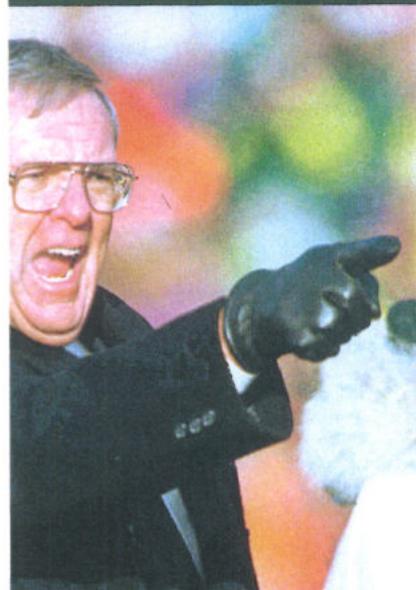


THE GREATEST STORY IN SPORTS

GREEN BAY PACKERS 1919-2019

CLIFF CHRISTL





Photos: Green Bay Packers

Offensive coaches Bob Schnelker (left) and Ray Wietecha (right) shared authority over the passing and running games, respectively, and were at constant loggerheads during Phil Bengtson's three seasons as coach.

the time Vince was out of there, you didn't have the big club telling (them what to do)."

What was at the root of their differences?

"Ray was hotheaded like I was," Schnelker answered in a 2003 interview.

Another mistake Bengtson made was a late-night raid in October 1969 at My Brother's Place, a new Main Street bar that had quickly become a hangout for Packers players, white and Black. Jim Whitcomb, the owner, befriended several of them and later became a business partner with Willie Wood. Whitcomb also formed a friendship with Adderley.

While Lombardi had rules and strictly enforced fines, he never feared his players were taking advantage of him. Bengtson, on the other hand, was sensitive to any suggestion that his team lacked discipline.

Suspecting his players might be breaking curfew, Bengtson, with a few drinks under his own belt, decided to go looking for trouble and found it that night at My Brother's Place. When he walked in along with his wife, he first spotted Chuck Mercein and Phil Vandersea at the bar, giving other players time to sneak out the door. Adderley was one of them and, thus, he avoided a fine. But the incident caused lasting issues among players and players, and between Bengtson and Adderley.

"Vince never went in the bars looking for us," Dave Robinson said in a 2011 interview. "So the rule was there, but Vince never imposed it. Phil actually imposed it and players lost respect for him."

In their eyes, he crossed the line by invading their personal lives. They knew they would have paid a price with Lombardi, too, but a different kind of price: maybe an unmerciful practice or a full day of browbeating where he let them all know that he had learned of their transgressions.

"The seeds were sown for Phil Bengtson losing the team when he raided that bar," Robinson said in

the book *Lombardi's Left Side*. "That started a downhill slide and it never stopped. After that, he lost the team, he lost everybody. After that, everybody thought, 'that rotten SOB.'"

Bengtson himself, like Lombardi, enjoyed a cocktail—bourbon in his case, Scotch in Lombardi's. But unlike Lombardi, there were times when Bengtson had too many when he was around his assistants, other staff members and even his players.

"Boy, when Phil was drinking, he'd go home and have it, then come back to St. Norbert (College)," Schnelker said in a 2009 interview. "We'd have some of the damndest arguments. When he was drinking it was like, 'I'm going to argue with Schnelker no matter what he says.'"

The players became aware of it during training camp, too, when there were evening meetings on the St. Norbert campus.

"Every night at those meetings, he'd be drunk," linebacker Jim Carter, a rookie in 1970, said in a 2010 interview. "He'd go to that coaches' 5 O'Clock Club and he'd come in staggering. He'd come to those meetings tipsy."

Beyond that, people around the league knew, too.



Jim Whitcomb

The clasped hands depicted on defensive tackle Bob Brown's mug at My Brother's Place represented what the Main Street bar in Green Bay was all about: It welcomed a diverse crowd when other places didn't. Thus, it quickly became a popular hangout for Packers players after it opened in 1969. Phil Bengtson, on the other hand, all but lost his team when he invaded it one night.